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ABSTRACT

In response to some of the problems identified in the areas of enrollment and retention at Chicago City Colleges, the Student Government Association (SGA) of Kennedy-King Community College (K-KCC) made several suggestions to alleviate these problems, especially as they existed at K-KCC. The first issue perceived by the SGA related to the enrollment process. The process was felt to be geared toward the needs and convenience of the staff rather than the student, and the SGA proposed that upgraded testing and advisement--including individualized, one-on-one attention--be designed to identify each student's true scholastic starting point and then to advise and place the student accordingly. The second issue addressed by the SGA related to the increasing numbers of underprepared students entering K-KCC and downward skewing levels of expectations of K-KCC students. The third set of issues considered was the failure of the entrance tests to assess students' knowledge/achievement level with regard to basic skills and their motivational level, and the undesirable consequences of the way these tests were scored and the limited way they were used in placement. The fourth set of problems dealt with the instructors' failure to accept and resolve to change the actual entrance level of their underprepared students. The final issue related to the detrimental effects of emphasizing grades, rather than skills. (AYC)

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ENROLLMENT & RETENTION: COUNSELING & TESTING

POSITION PAPER

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Truman Community College

By

The Student Government Association

Of

Kennedy-King Community College

(Gilbert R. Armour, SGA President)

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INTRODUCTION:

It is not the purpose of this position paper to assume a position of criticism, nor even of problem identification per se. It is obvious from reading the agenda of this conference that we are all aware of the problems, and that the Faculty Council has in good faith open-mindedly considered and admitted to the valid and constructive criticisms leveled in the past. Thus, to continue leveling criticism would be anti-productive in terms of formulating solutions; and any position paper not contributing to the search for solutions would per force itself be a part of the problem.

Of course, no one person or subgroup could possibly have the wisdom or capacity to provide any ultimate or "miraculous" solution. Indeed, the Faculty Council has shown its insightfulness, and has taken the first major step in the process, by sponsoring this coming together of many concerned individuals and by structuring the workshop approach to problem-solving. On the other hand, we all recognize that each area detailed in the agenda does indeed impact on the total academic structure and that any solution to one aspect must by its very nature impact on many aspects. Thus it is with the following items of discussion . . . which are offered not as final solutions, but as suggestions; not as any "one and only right answer," but as possible alternatives contributory towards and to be considered in the search for innovative approaches to problems that historically have not been solved by traditional means.

Finally, this paper cannot help but concentrate on those areas which are observable at -- and possibly unique to -- Kennedy-King Community College. This is not due to any campus chauvinism or lack of concern for the total City College system. Rather, it is a function of addressing areas where empirical knowledge and expertise can be put forth as one contribution to the total group problem-solving process.

PERCEIVED ISSUE:

The student's collegiate experience starts with the enrollment process; and it is here that a positive or a negative tone can be set which continues throughout the scholastic experience and possibly throughout life. As currently structured, however, the enrollment process seems geared towards the needs and convenience of everyone except the incoming student. Nor would making the current enrollment structure work more efficiently be sufficient, for we believe that the structure itself is faulty. We believe that the ultimate purpose of the enrollment procedure should be to benefit the student.

SUGGESTIONS:

- . That an upgraded enrollment procedure of detailed testing and advisement -- including individualized, one-on-one attention -- be structured to identify each student's true scholastic starting point and to then advise and place that student based thereon.
- . That to ensure student-beneficial testing and advisement, qualified testers, advisors, and other enrollment facilitators be specially trained/oriented to handle their specific areas of responsibility.
- . That sufficient time to ensure the in-depth completion of student-beneficial testing and advisement be allowed by starting the enrollment procedure not one week before classes start, but perhaps as far in advance as one month.
- . That, granting that the onus of time/effort on enrollment personnel would thus be increased, every effort be made to employ enrollment personnel who recognize and agree that the emphasis ought to rest on rendering the greatest possible assistance and offering the best possible opportunities to the student by whatever means necessary.

PERCEIVED ISSUE:

We realize that as long as the Chicago Public Schools system (grades kindergarten through twelfth) continues to pour out under-educated and even functionally illiterate "graduates," much of the onus for addressing and correcting this condition -- especially for minorities and other socio-economically disadvantaged students -- will continue to burden the Chicago City Colleges.

We further realize that some of the faultiness of the current enrollment/placement procedure is due to the strictures of financial support for the Chicago City Colleges, by the open-door policy, and by the downward skewing of levels of expectation in order to allow state aid for more students. We are in total agreement with the open-door policy. We feel, however, that the downward skewing of levels of expectation is detrimental to the long-term best interests of the student . . . since s/he is "fooled" into thinking s/he is on a higher level than is actually true, and faces a rude awakening and sense of failure and frustration when it is time to leave the City College and enter a four-year institution or a career field which expects more than has been learned/achieved.

SUGGESTIONS:

- . That the Chicago City Colleges be careful to avoid considering ourselves an "island" or abdicating our responsibilities by attempting to "stay in our place" and ignore the broader problems that do not seem to fit within our little purview.
- . That the Chicago City Colleges openly admit/advocate that we are but one link in the educational chain, and that it behooves us to ensure and enhance the strength and interrelationship of every link that impacts upon us or that we impact upon.
- . That, in our own best interests and to help alleviate these problems and modify the socio-political attitudes that engender and maintain them, the Chicago City Colleges involve themselves to a much greater degree in working with/impacting upon the City of Chicago, the Chicago Public Schools system, the public and private four-year institutions located in Chicago and environs, and the State of Illinois.

PERCEIVED ISSUE:

Without the basics of language and mathematical skills, no student can possibly take advantage of collegiate-level discussions and study materials. But the entrance tests used do not really address this issue. First of all, multiple-choice testing is in itself nearly useless in determining a student's true knowledge/achievement level and, even more important, his/her insight/motivation level. Secondly, the tests currently being used are based on skills expected at the 12.0 level (first day of twelfth grade) and, worse yet, is then graded on a curve pattern rather than on a level of expectation. Thirdly, the results of testing place the student in one of only a few first-semester subject courses, all of which seem to start below the average level of expectation (13.0) of the society around us that these students are supposedly being educated to enter on an equitable level.

SUGGESTIONS:

- . That the current multiple-choice testing be merely the first step in the testing procedure.
- . That, as a result of this first-step testing, the incoming/re-entering student be placed into one of (no less than) ten broad achievement-level groups for the continuation of the testing procedure.
- . That the student be assigned to a qualified advisor specially trained and oriented to work with members of the given achievement-level group, which advisor will work with the student -- on an individual, one-on-one basis -- to complete enrollment.
- . That, to identify the student's level of functional literacy or lack thereof and thus the student's true scholastic starting point, the advisor administer to the individual student a reading comprehension test, a language-skills essay test, and a mathematical-skills word-problem test . . . culturally/temporally relevant tests.
- . That the advisor then enter in-depth discussion with the student to "test" his/her verbal skills and, more important, to solicit his/her concept of his/her own starting point, needs in terms of educational preparation for career and life-style goals, and methods/resources for fulfilling those needs.
- . That if the student evidences this insight and motivation, the advisor proceed to assist the student in implementation; but that if the student is in error, the advisor bring the student to a recognition of reality . . . while carefully placing the onus for any functional illiteracy where it rightfully belongs, with the insufficiencies of previous education, not with the "dumbness" of the student.

PERCEIVED ISSUE:

Even given the identification of each student's starting point or level, it too often seems that the instructor insists on expecting the student to respond academically on the instructor's level. This places the student in an untenable situation and engenders a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure wherein the student, already castigated as "dumb," then adds self-castigation for what appears to be an inability to learn. Conversely, even where the student believes s/he is doing well -- either because the instructor grades on a curve that compares the student with his/her classmates rather than with the expectations of the society s/he is supposedly being educated to enter, or because the instructor favors him/her for some reason -- the rude awakening is going to occur at some point. In addition, because of such standard procedures as the current methods of evaluating instructors and giving tenure and so forth, it is much too easy and tempting for an instructor to take a student who entered his/her course unprepared and, at semester's end, pass that student -- still unprepared -- to another instructor, who will probably continue the vicious cycle . . . until the student finally "graduates" with a meaningless degree.

SUGGESTIONS:

- . That every effort be made to employ instructors who recognize and agree it is not the function of a teacher to stand outside the student's horizons and demand that the student "break out" and come to the teacher's level, but rather to enter the student's horizons and guide him/her to the threshold of his/her mind and then join in cooperatively pushing those horizons outward.
- . That on the entrance and the exit day(s) of each semester, each student be administered a stringent test, with the results being then compared to determine how much -- and what -- the student achieved during the semester.
- . That these tests -- based on national expectation levels, not on a curve or any other method which allows for downward skewing -- be developed, administered, and evaluated by a reputable and qualified third-party agency totally divorced from the Chicago City Colleges system and with no vested interest in that system or the employment of anyone therein.
- . That the payment of each instructor be directly pro rated according to the progress achieved by his/her students during the semester as evidenced by the comparison of the entrance and exit tests, with the formula being further developed to allow the weighting of results in those cases where a physical, mental, emotional, or lingual handicap should be taken into account when evaluating the student's progress.

PERCEIVED ISSUES:

Western pedagogy emphasizes grades obtained rather than skills and attitudes developed. Furthermore, the struggle for "the grade" places each student in a competitive situation with its resulting aggressions, fears, frustrations, failures, internal dissonances, hostilities, etc. This has been especially detrimental in schools where the student or student/instructor body is ethnically or socio-economically mixed. Finally, the emphasis on grades -- rather than on the skills represented thereby -- encourages the student to study "just for the grade," which lasts only until the grade/degree is obtained, rather than for love of learning, which would encourage the student to desire/continue self-development and growth throughout life. Also, enforced competitiveness engendered in the academic system is carried over into the student's current and future life style, thus ensuring that upcoming generations will be expected/motivated to follow the same competitive mode, in turn ensuring that the vicious cycle of academic and "real life" competitiveness will continue.

SUGGESTIONS:

- . That the Chicago City Colleges work towards de-emphasizing grades and re-emphasizing the skills/attitudes development education is supposed to provide.
- . That the Chicago City Colleges investigate experimental and innovative educational processes, such as those used by Universities Without Walls, for the purpose of adapting relevant portions to the traditional academic process.
- . That during enrollment, the advisor guide each student to see the value of skills/attitudes development in terms of his/her own career/life-style goals; and help the student identify his/her starting point, define goals, catalogue needs, recognize/access methods/resources for fulfilling those needs, and enter into a written contract with the college detailing how s/he will combine collegiate and life experiences to fulfill his/her educational process.
- . That special effort be made to give the student life-experience credit for any non-scholastic activity accomplished on behalf of the college itself.
- . That students be encouraged/motivated to form study groups as part of their courses.
- . That the Chicago City Colleges conduct an in-depth investigation of recent experiments in cooperation-oriented, as opposed to competition-oriented, pedagogy; and then conduct such experiments in the colleges, or request of a reputable and qualified third-party agency that such experiments be developed/conducted therein . . . with special care being taken that everyone involved, from the Chancellor to each individual instructor, render unstinting support thereof.

CONCLUSION:

We reiterate and re-emphasize that the foregoing are neither demands nor attempts to state "the one and only" answer to the problems recognized and being addressed by the Faculty Council. They are suggestions, alternatives being offered for consideration. But we firmly believe that new and innovative -- even unorthodox and "far out" -- solutions must be sought, for it is obvious that traditional solutions are not working. We sincerely hope that the efforts involved and ideas put forth in this position document will prove useful in helping you as you continue your endeavors to help us learn and grow.

The purpose of the Chicago City Colleges is to pave the way for tomorrow's involved citizens, responsible consumers, dynamic producers, and -- most important of all -- concerned and qualified teachers. But the student poorly educated today will become, in self-fulfilling prophecy, the ignorant person of tomorrow. And the person scarred by today's collegiate competitiveness will become the aggressor that tomorrow most hurts ourselves and our society.